

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY/ ROWNTREE TRUST SURVEY IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE BELFAST TELEGRAPH AND UTV - DAY TWO

The people's vote



Dr COLIN IRWIN, of Queen's University, analyses the findings of an in-depth opinion poll undertaken on the eve of Monday's crucial Stormont talks

SUMMARY

94% of the people of Northern Ireland want a referendum that will give them an opportunity to vote on the terms of a settlement. But when, how and under what circumstances do the people want to exercise their right of consent?

All the issues that surround this complex question need to be opened up to the widest, possible debate over the coming months. In the meantime it should not be forgotten that nearly all of these prob-

lems could melt away to almost nothing if all the parties elected to the Stormont Talks could reach an agreement on a negotiated settlement and commend that settlement to their electorate.

QUESTION 1

SHOULD WALKOUTS STOP THE TALKS?

Although 92% of the people of Northern Ireland want their party to stay in the Talks, some parties have already left and others

could take their leave at almost any time. What then? Should those who remain do their best to take matters forward? If any of

the remaining unionists leave (presumably the UUP) then 59% of Protestants would consider it to be unacceptable to continue with the Talks. But 33% of Catholics and 18% of Protestants would have a serious problem with Sinn Féin leaving. As for any of the other main parties leaving (presumably the SDLP) a majority of Catholics, 51%, could not entertain the Talks going ahead. The reality at the Talks, under the current rules, is that if either the UUP or SDLP walk out then the Talks will be

brought to an end. In some way that reality seems to be both understood and accepted by the unionist and nationalist communities respectively.

Four options on this issue were put forward as questions in the poll and everyone interviewed was asked which ones they considered to be 'Desirable', 'Acceptable', 'Tolerable' as part of a lasting settlement or 'Unacceptable' under any circumstances. (The same options apply to questions 2, 4, and 5).

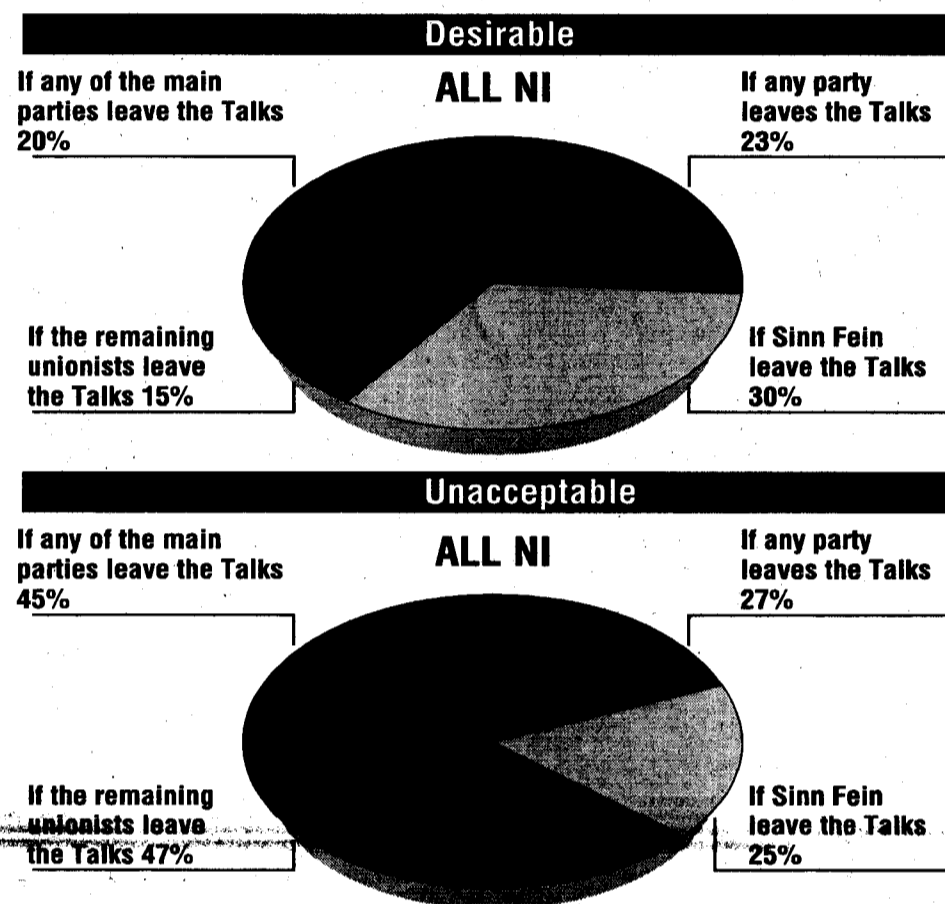
Question - 'If any parties leave the Talks - The remaining parties, whoever they are, should continue with their negotiations and try to conclude a settlement that can be placed before the people of Northern Ireland in a referendum.'
If Sinn Féin leave the Talks - The remaining parties, whoever they are, should continue with their negotiations and try to conclude a settlement that can be placed before the people of Northern Ireland in a referendum.

Question - 'If any of the main parties leave the Talks - Then the Talks should be stopped.'
If the remaining Unionists leave the Talks - The other remaining parties, whoever they are, should continue with their negotiations and try to conclude a settlement that can be placed before the people of Northern Ireland in a referendum.

ALL NI	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
If any parties leave the Talks	23	28	22	27
If Sinn Féin leave the Talks	30	26	19	25
If the remaining unionists leave the Talks	15	18	20	47
If any of the main parties leave the Talks	20	16	19	45

PROTESTANT	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
If any parties leave the Talks	19	25	25	31
If Sinn Féin leave the Talks	39	27	16	18
If the remaining unionists leave the Talks	12	12	17	59
If any of the main parties leave the Talks	23	15	22	40

CATHOLIC	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
If any parties leave the Talks	28	32	19	21
If Sinn Féin leave the Talks	20	25	22	33
If the remaining unionists leave the Talks	20	27	22	31
If any of the main parties leave the Talks	17	18	19	51



QUESTION 2

A REFERENDUM EVEN IF TALKS FAIL?

If a settlement cannot be agreed or if the UUP or SDLP leave, what then? The views of both Catholics and Protestants are very similar on this issue. A referendum either next May if a settlement has not been reached or a referendum if the Talks collapse is quite acceptable with rates of unacceptability ranging between just 9 and 13%. Conversely an imposed settlement or 'No referendum' is hardly acceptable at all. In these cases rates of unacceptability range between 47 and 65% for Catholics and between 66 and 86% for Protestants.

Question - 'Referendum next May - If the Talks do not produce an agreement by the end of next May the two governments should place a settlement package before the people of Northern Ireland in a referendum.'
Referendum if Talks collapse - In the event of the Talks collapsing the two governments should place a settlement package before the people of Northern Ireland in a referendum.
Impose settlement if Talks collapse - In the event of the Talks collapsing the two governments should impose a settlement package on the people of Northern Ireland.
No referendum - In the event of the Talks collapsing the British government should not hold a referendum but should simply try to govern Northern Ireland.'

ALL NI	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
Referendum next May	33	41	17	9
Referendum if Talks collapse	22	46	20	12
Impose settlement if Talks collapse	4	12	25	59
No referendum	6	9	19	66

PROTESTANT	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
Referendum next May	37	36	17	10
Referendum if Talks collapse	26	44	17	13
Impose settlement if Talks collapse	3	9	22	66
No referendum	8	11	14	67

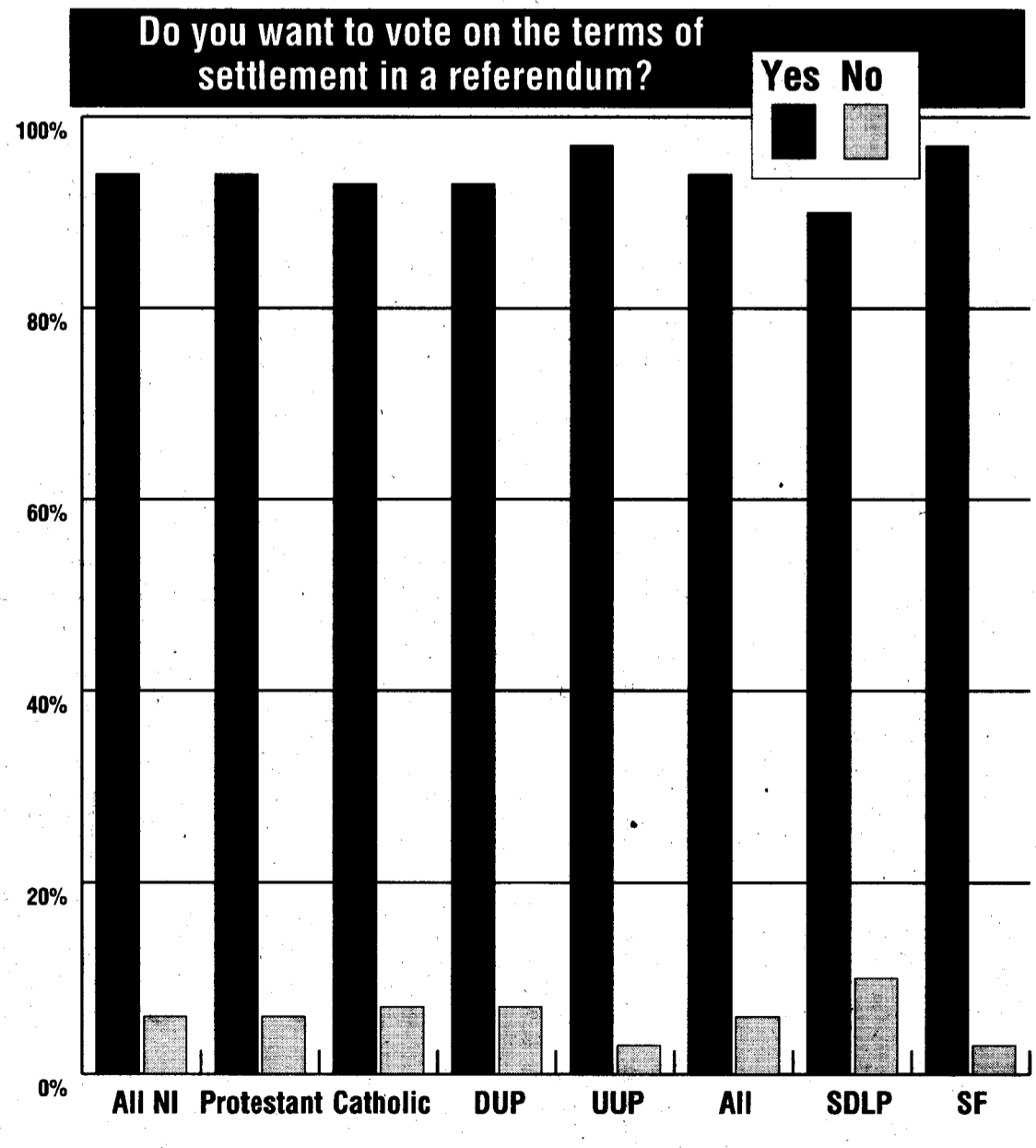
CATHOLIC	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
Referendum next May	28	47	16	9
Referendum if Talks collapse	17	51	21	11
Impose settlement if Talks collapse	7	19	30	47
No referendum	4	7	24	65

QUESTION 3

DO YOU WANT TO HAVE A SAY IN ULSTER'S FUTURE?

When offered a simple YES or NO response to the following question, 94% of the people of Northern Ireland said YES

Question - 'Do you want to be given an opportunity to vote on the terms of a settlement in a referendum?'



THE POLL

This poll was undertaken with the support of a grant from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust in association with the Belfast Telegraph and UTV. With the co-operation of members from the ten leading political parties in Northern Ireland the research was carried out by Dr Colin Irwin of the Institute of Irish Studies at The Queen's University of Belfast.

Market Research Northern Ireland (MRNI) conducted the fieldwork for the survey between Tuesday and Thursday last week. Nine hundred and ninety two 'face to face' interviews were completed from 48 points across Northern Ireland to give a representative quota sample of the population.

In all respects the poll was undertaken within the guidelines set out by the Market Research Society (UK) and in accordance with their code of conduct.

QUESTION 4

A REFERENDUM HELD NORTH AND SOUTH?

Voting on the terms of a settlement may mean very different things to different people. When it comes to who should vote, or rather where the vote should take place, four options were put on offer.

The most popular option over all was 'Only Northern Ireland' with 92% of Protestants considering such a referendum 'Desirable' or 'Acceptable' with 44% of Catholics holding similar views. However 32% of Catholics also considered this option unacceptable. Catholics would prefer separate referenda in the 'North' and 'South' or in the island of Ireland as a whole. But this latter option is unacceptable to 86% of Protestants. So separate votes in the 'North' and 'South' is probably the only acceptable compromise and even then most Protestants may well consider the vote in the South to be irrelevant.

Question - Where should the vote for the referendum take place.

- Only Northern Ireland - A referendum in Northern Ireland only.**
- Both North and South - Separate but concurrent referenda in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.**
- Island of Ireland - A single referendum in the island of Ireland as a whole.**
- UK - GB and NI - A single referendum in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland as a whole.**

ALL NI	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
Only Northern Ireland	52	20	12	16
Both North and South	13	26	13	48
Island of Ireland	16	16	12	56
UK - GB and NI	10	19	22	49

PROTESTANT	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
Only Northern Ireland	74	18	5	3
Both North and South	4	11	14	71
Island of Ireland	2	5	7	86
UK - GB and NI	14	19	15	52

CATHOLIC	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
Only Northern Ireland	24	24	20	32
Both North and South	24	45	13	18
Island of Ireland	34	30	16	20
UK - GB and NI	7	18	31	44

QUESTION 5

WHAT PERCENTAGE PASSES A REFERENDUM?

What kind of vote is acceptable to both communities in Northern Ireland? Of the three options put on offer, Protestants would prefer a referendum based on a simple majority, only 9% find this option unacceptable. On the other hand most Catholics would prefer a referendum that required a separate majority from each of the two main communities. A weighted majority is the second choice option for both Catholics and Protestants.

In practice this compromise may turn out to be the only viable option as separate votes from each community may require some sort of community registration. Other problems not dealt with here include determining what is an acceptable level of turnout, how should abstentionism be dealt with and should people be required to vote as a matter of law.

And if these problems weren't enough to be getting on with what about votes on different aspects of a settlement that clearly deal with changes to the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, on the one hand, and aspects of a settlement that have nothing to do with the constitutional status of Northern Ireland on the other hand. Should this issue be treated differently?

- Question - 'What kind of vote is acceptable to both communities here.'** Three options were put on offer:
Simple majority - A simple majority of the people of Northern Ireland - More than 50%.
Weighted majority - A larger majority of the people of Northern Ireland - Approximately 70%.
A majority from both communities - A separate majority of the people from each of the two main communities in Northern Ireland - More than 50% from each community.

ALL NI	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
Simple majority	29	32	21	18
Weighted majority	18	31	30	21
A majority from both communities	29	29	17	25

PROTESTANT	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
Simple majority	42	34	15	9
Weighted majority	21	34	26	19
A majority from both communities	15	29	21	35

CATHOLIC	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
Simple majority	13	29	29	29
Weighted majority	13	30	34	23
A majority from both communities	48	29	12	11